12/8/64

Radio of 1.8,
(with Dylan T's
boat)

Louis Bonnerot

P.S. Have not read this letter through, so forgive illegibilities & possible lack of main verbs or worse.

Har. 2899.

Monksdene.
2 Northwick Park Rd
Harrow Middlesex.
Wed. 12th August 1964.

Dearest René

Thanks very much for yr long letter which came to-day.

I'm so glad Barbara Moray came to see you — she said she would write to you when she went to Ireland. I never knew where she lived in Ireland, but when I told her where you had bought a house she said that her place was in that part & I asked her to get in touch with you as I felt sure you would like her. She's been a very good friend to me since I first met her early in the last war — I suppose it would be 1939. She is absolutely direct & straightforward and without an ounce of affectation as well as being extremely perceptive and has also ~~been~~ had great trials to bear, but I've never known her display anything other than a gallant ~~anything~~ spirit and an unfailing sense of humour, as well as of understanding and kindness.

Well, yes, I'm not so bad. Wish I felt less weary & exhausted. Yes, hell of a lot of 'interviews' & stuff; don't know what any of it amounts to really. Endless half-answered correspondence, partly due to my stuff being published in the U.S.A. What of creativity? I don't know. Have managed to ~~[illegible]~~ make two rather long coloured inscriptions: the first for a couple of years owing to my eye-trouble but they seem neither better nor much worse so I thought I'd chance it, one for ~~[illegible]~~ the First Communion of Hugh & Antonia Fraser's eldest daughter whose ~~christened~~ Christening seemed about a year ago — & now she's seven! & the other for Peter Levi S.J.'s ordination card. He's a friend of mine, a poet, and of extraordinary apperception & intelligence apart from being of a charming disposition. I expect he'll have a pretty tough time with the Society.

I'm so glad you find that you like Shanagarry still or even more than in your first enchantment with it. So Rosalind is up in the town of the hurdles.* Give her my love when ~~she~~ returns. Very interesting about ~~[illegible]~~ 'Major Bell, he was a grand man!' I can just hear them saying it.

* forgotten the Celtic word for it. does 'ford' come into it as well? still can't find any of my books, since the move. Still have ~~both~~ packing-cases of books unpacked in a recess outside the room & don't quite know how I'm going to fit them in. The room being two feet narrower than the old one makes it seem very congested.

Walter (S) came the other day with Evan Gill, who now lives in London. Jolly nice seeing Walter I think he said he was going to see you in September. Evan G. has just published a book about Eric's inscriptions. He's alright, but everything seems to be like stamp-collecting. He amuses me inside, enormously because he has all sorts of things about him that reminded me in accidents of Eric but were so totally other in substance that the result (for me) was quite comic. I told him there would be a photograph of the New College War memorial in the book, but there wasn't. But he said, 'It's catalogued, No 266, A., page 9991, dated 1921, erected 1922' — reeled off without the slightest hitch. — 5,432 1" Roman caps. 1,621 ½" l.c. incised & painted with red ochre, ~~[illegible]~~ total area 12¼ miles ~~by~~ 18 feet. — that kind of thing. But I must say he has ~~[illegible]~~ worked with great care & has probably done a very useful job. I like him too. But it was this particular type of exactitude that amused me.

②

That feeling for men of prowess and stature is very strong in them, isn't it. There's something very physical about it. That Irish woman I've told you of who used to work in our house in Sheffield Terrace used to say of somebody or other "Sure, he was a fine figure of a man." I suppose it comes straight ~~down~~ through from the old Celtic warrior-aristocracy; and was transferred in vestigial form to the English 'Ascendancy', especially if they were ~~[illegible]~~ of martial ~~[illegible]~~ bearing at all.

Harman is coming out here to-morrow (Thursday) & we are dining together. He's been away in the country for about a month, & they are getting ready to leave Tenby Mansions on Sept 18th. Sabina has gone to France for nine months. Harman thinks he will be finally out of the B.B.C. by December. I think Ann Kallin is retiring in Oct. or so I hear. That won't help the 3rd Programme, I fear.

Yes, dear Charlie B. — he has been having some heart-trouble on & off for a while but apparently while on holiday in Spain he became very ill — in the state of utter exhaustion. He seemed to get better under treatment & was home in Birmingham when he suddenly got much worse again & died — I think it was some form of cancer in the blood-stream, actually — something of that sort. I can hardly take in that he is no longer alive. He wrote to me, in answer to a letter of mine, a few days before he died.

They did ~~I~~ Douglas C's radio production of I.P. ~~one~~ the 3rd. Pro. on the ~~Aug~~ 8th. ~~[illegible]~~ it's odd, but since I've been here, I've not had my little wireless installed nor have I read the newspapers, because I used to have The Times for a ~~[illegible]~~ short but this is too far away on the Hill, for the boy to deliver it & I've never bothered about getting a ~~[illegible]~~ news agent nearer to do so. I can't say I've missed either! However I did get the wireless fixed to hear how I.P. sounded after an interval of some nine years (I think 1955 was its last previous performance) but more because Douglas had managed to find a 'hard recording' of the 'Boast of Dai' recorded by Dylan Thomas in the 1949 production. This production

I hate that blasted music they use in the radio I.P. 'background music' I think they call it: But they also do imitation chant bits at the beginning of each Part which obliterate the words, apart from being a bore. The rattle of machine-guns & occasional shell-bursts I don't mind, as I can see that for the listener, that may be a help. And the singing in Welsh of 'Jesu lover of my soul' in Section VII did enhance the feeling of the words of my text.

P.S. I had a very nice visit of a remarkable woman an archaeologist at Oxford. She had been commissioned by Penguin to write a concise account of the pre-history of Europe (what a task!) and she wanted to quote some bits of things I'd written. She is the authoress of that translation of the Epic of Gilgamesh (Penguin paperback) which I had so greatly enjoyed a year or so back. I remember that it was translated by someone called N. Sandars, but thought it was a man. But it was by this elderly lady, Nancy Sandars. I'll tell you more in next letter.

something she wrote to me since, quoting Mircea Eliade, has a bearing on your Cuchulain etc. mythology.

could not be used in 1955 because it was
a 'soft recording' & they deteriorate quickly.
So D. had to make a fresh recording in 1955
but Dylan was then dead. However somebody
or other had made a hard recording of Dylan's
reading of 'Dai Boast' so that was ~~inter~~ inserted
into this 1964 production, & Dylan was
perfect for that bit — as I wanted to hear it
again & did. Otherwise it was as in 1955 &
my reactions were about the same. It's awfully
rum this transference from one art-form to another.
In the case of I.P. the 'poetry' suffers very
gravely, the 'narrative' ~~[illegible]~~
becomes much more predominant. Some
things put in enrage me — far more than anything
~~that~~ is left out. However I try to think of it
as a separate thing altogether from the Book, as one
might think of an Opera based on well, anything
you like, Pilgrim's Progress let's say.

It's very ingeniously done in many places.
It must be a buster of a job to reduce a
~~[illegible]~~ written work of that sort & length to
two hours of radio-production.

Of course, some chaps, who find the book
very hard going indeed, are enthralled by
the radio version and say "Well, now I
understand, it all comes alive,". So there we are.

Had a very nice visit about ten days or a
fortnights back from Louis Bonnerot the professor of
English at the Sorbonne, the tutor of
Catherine Rousseau (née Ivainer) who did that
thesis on The Anathemata. He was in London
& ~~wanted~~ came out to see me as he's
giving a lecture on The Ana. in Bruxelles
in a few months' time. He's a jolly nice
chap. About my age, but young & vigorous
& alert and well knit in that way
Frenchmen so often are. With the Legion of
Honour riband* in the lapel of his jacket.
I had long wanted to meet him, for
he wrote a review of I.P. in a magazine
he edits called something either English
Studies (but in French of course) way back
in 1937 or '38. I enjoyed talking with
him greatly. He especially likes the
picture of Tristan ac Essyllt in the ship.

* What was that joke we used to have about someone with
a hat with ~~[illegible]~~ "a pipe in the riband of it"
was it in old Joyce or before we knew of Joyce. I cannot remember.
Talking of hats & ribands reminds me also of a jolly nice thing I
heard a Welshman say when I was in Northwick Lodge — no, I didn't hear him
say it, but a doctor at Northwick Lodge told me about it — he had a Welsh friend
who was a bit drunk and said "Why man, listen! can you hear the band round my hat?
I can — very loud it is."

④

But somehow, in general, ~~that~~ those sorts of Frenchman who are not only academically able & informed but perceptive as well, are so invigorating compared with most of English academic people. easier to talk to.

He told me that poor Catherine had failed again in that bloody L'Agrégation thing. And now she's married & has one child, though she's going to have another shot at it, it seems almost impossible, for it's so damn exacting that it requires every ounce of a person's concentration.

He was very amused when he discovered that I'd never read a poem by Yeats about Leda & the Swan — I'd never even heard of the bloody thing. He ~~say~~ said, Ah, that's so happy for you artists, you need read only what you wish or require, whereas we unfortunate tutors or professors of this or that have to read everything pertaining to our particular subject, whether we want to or not.

They asked me to send some pictures to the Fine Arts' section of the Eisteddfod this year which was at Abertawe (Swansea) well, eventually, after all sorts of complications of jury which I can't go into all the details - photographs for the catalogue, writing of innumerable letters I got three works collected & sent off. and thought, well, that's done with, anyhow. But oh no. About a week later a sweet chap rang me up & said. I wish to inform you, unofficially, but it has been unanimously decided that you be awarded the Gold Medal in the visual arts section of the National Eisteddfod. It will presented to you at the opening ceremony on ~~August~~ Monday August 3rd at 9.30 A.M. I do earnestly ask you to be present. I know from report that you find it difficult to go to places especially to attend public ceremonies. ~~one~~ I understand that this is a phobia. But there is scriptural authority that love casteth out fear & our love toward you will surely overcome that phobia, & so on. I tried to explain but it was not much use. I do hope they weren't too hurt by my not going. I wrote a long letter to the President or rather the Secretary of the Eisteddfod expressing my ~~thankfulness~~ appreciation & regret that I could ~~come~~ not be there. Apart from my 'phobia' etc, think of it, August Bank Holiday at 9 A.M. in Swansea. Of all the ~~worst~~ week-ends in the year. None the less I was

sorry for they set such store upon 'occasions'. Valerie rang me up from the Eisteddfod pavilion. I was greatly relieved to hear her voice, for I'd not heard from her for many weeks and it appears she had not received letters I had sent, owing, no doubt, to an infernal postal ~~..~~ mess that prevailed here for some time. Poor darling she's having a difficult time. She's developed asthma. She went to Majorca for a few weeks & was quite alright there but was no sooner back home than the asthma returned. She had no attacks of it while in South Wales at the Eisteddfod, but when I 'phoned her a few days ago at Caernarvon she had had a further attack & ~~[illegible]~~ had been to Liverpool for treatment, & on returning home she found poor Michael, her husband, in bed with mumps. She is expecting another child early in October, so one way & another, they are being a bit battered. She sounded remarkably cheerful, however. I'm sorry about this asthma thing, it's a fearful thing. And it's not funny to have mumps when you're grown up. Must stop, dead tired.

Much love to Jean. Very glad Barbara M. came to see you.

Again thanks for the letter. Also seem to labour a lot to no purpose as

I is not so bad. except for this blasted weariness. perhaps it's "our old friend "essential ill-will" again.

I feel much older, and puzzled - can't come to ~~any~~ conclusions - it would be off. Much love Dai.

But whatever it is I should be oblivious, like Taplow's 'premature infant'.